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Garrison's Probe Nurtured By Gullibility, Not Evidence

The New Orleans investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy is surely one of the most bizarre exercises in American history. It may also be among the most irresponsible.

District Attorney Jim Garrison has been poking around for months among a weird collection of oddballs, no-goodniks and publicity hounds, trying to tie together the case for an assassination plot that he claimed he had solved months ago.

A few strange coincidences, including the death of his "key character," have given Garrison some front-page headlines. And the D.A. has produced an "eyewitness" to the conspiracy whose veracity is made questionable by the fact that he contradicted himself.

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But Garrison has not produced one solid fact to disprove the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald alone murdered President Kennedy.

The dismaying thing about the New Orleans spectacle is that Garrison can roll along for months more without producing any facts. Millions of people seize eagerly every ugly rumor of some nefarious plot to kill President Kennedy. And the more prominent the names linked to the alleged plot, the more wide-eyed and gullible the suckers become.

Garrison seems to have become acutely aware in recent days that his collection of New Orleans small-fry just wasn't adding up to the bombshell that he had promised. But the loquacious D.A. has been reading the newspapers, so he knew what the public would buy as a scapegoat.

How Can He Lose?

With the run of luck the Central Intelligence Agency has had lately, you could accuse the CIA of originating LSD and the miniskirt, and a lot of people would believe it.

So how can Garrison lose when he charges the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation with covering up the evidence that he needs?

He managed to take the headlines away from Alvin R. Beauboeuf who had charged that one of Garrison's investigators tried both to bribe and blackmail him into testifying that he had heard a New Orleans group conspiring to kill Kennedy.

Garrison boasted weeks ago that anyone who bets against him "will lose." It seems pretty clear that no matter which way his investigation goes, the United States will lose.

If, to this reporter's surprise, he proves the existence of a plot that the FBI and CIA tried to cover up, the damage to this nation is obvious. We would have, and would deserve, the contempt of the entire civilized world.

But even if Garrison's investigation fizzles out as just another grandiose publicity gimmick by an overly-ambitious politician, the seeds of doubt and suspicion will remain firmly rooted in the dirt-rich recesses of minds prepared to believe the worst.

Some Americans and millions of foreigners will go on believing that the sinister CIA and the ruthless old FBI blocked Garrison from the truth.

FBI Agents Subpenaed

Garrison has subpenaed certain FBI agents. He reportedly has also subpenaed CIA Director Richard Helms, who is asked to produce what Garrison claims is a photograph of Oswald and a burly Cuban in front of the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City in the fall of 1953.

Garrison presumably needs the photograph (which CIA sources swear is nonexistent) to prove his contention that Oswald really was a CIA agent.

The likelihood is that the New Orleans Grand Jury will never hear a word of testimony from Helms or the FBI agents. The Justice Department surely will hold that national security interests will not permit them to expose themselves to quizzing before this panel.

But one wishes, somehow, that the CIA and FBI could put enough cards before the public to destroy Garrison's prime asset — public gullibility born of long-nourished doubts and suspicions.